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amnesty international news release

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DOCTORS FIND LASTING EFFECTS OF TORTURE IN ARGENTINE VICTIMS

COPENHAGEN -- A team of Amnesty International doctors today (Wednesday, October 1, 1980) said they had diagnosed long-term effects of torture in political prisoners who had been previously arrested and interrogated by Argentine security forces.

Extensive medical studies carried out on 14 former prisoners, now living in exile, have showed that they are still suffering from nightmares, emotional withdrawal and other psychiatric disturbances. The Amnesty International doctors said marks on the victims' bodies and other symptoms were consistent with the tortures reported to have been inflicted on them by interrogators after they were arrested more than four years ago.

A 30-year-old teacher, arrested in Neuquen, Argentina in 1976, who later testified he had been beaten, given repeated electric shocks in the throat and mouth and nearly asphyxiated by a plastic bag held over his head, was found to be now progressively losing his hearing and to suffer stomach pains and various mental problems.

A 31-year-old mother of two, arrested in Buenos Aires in 1976, was found to have heart and respiratory problems. She told Amnesty International her interrogators had blindfolded her, strapped her spread-eagled on a metal bed and fastened electrodes to her temples and other sensitive parts of her body.

The electrodes on her temples fixed her mouth in a half-open position. As a result of this temporary paralysis, she found herself unable to scream or draw breath, causing a sensation of near-suffocation and bringing on death fantasies.

The medical study whose results are published today is the most detailed examination of torture victims yet conducted using research techniques pioneered by doctors working for Amnesty International. The doctors, based in Denmark, examined every major organ system of the subjects and also looked for signs of psychological disturbances.

"Many people think torture is a brief, brutal attack on a prisoner," said Dr. Ole Rasmussen, Amnesty International's medical adviser.

"The horror has a permanent effect. The long-term psychological effects in these victims are similar to those found in concentration camp survivors."

The doctors hope that these studies will help them to develop better techniques for the treatment and rehabilitation of torture victims throughout the world. Two of the 14 Argentine victims have already received dental care and physiotherapy in Denmark.

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NOTE: Medical groups in the United States are doing work similar to that of the Danish doctors. For information on this aspect of Amnesty International's work, please contact: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL U.S.A. MEDICAL CAPACITY COMMITTEE, 307 W. Mt. Pleasant Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19119.

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